



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

Failure to mitigate climate change putting Australians' health at risk

Media release

18 February 2014

The new report on heatwaves from Australia's Climate Council reaffirms the serious and increasing health risks posed to the community by heatwaves, Dr Liz Hanna, researcher on heat and health at Australian National University, and Climate and Health Alliance President, said today.

"Heatwaves are now more frequent and more intense, and we are witnessing a dramatic increase in the number of near deaths and deaths from heatwaves over the last decade. Heat is also precipitating more heart attacks, kidney failure, and other health emergencies," Dr Hanna said.

The report *'Heatwaves: Hotter, Longer and More Often'* reveals hot days have doubled in Australia, and have already reached predicted 2030 levels.

The recent heatwave in south-eastern Australia was the longest run of days over 40C since 1908. During the heatwave, there were more than 203 deaths reported to the coroner in Victoria, more than twice the average. On Friday of that week, one of the hottest days, there was a 700% rise in ambulance call-outs for cardiac arrests in Victoria. Adelaide was the hottest city in the world that day.

"These deaths and medical emergencies from heatwaves are an alarming portent of what is to come," said Dr Hanna.

"Health and medical experts have been calling for emissions reductions as a matter of public health for several years now, and we are now witnessing the consequences of the failure to respond."

Dr Hanna warns there is much worse to come.

"We've seen from heatwaves in Europe that the number of deaths can increase dramatically, as much as ten-fold, from a small increase in warming. We know that the human body has limits in terms of its adaptive capacity, and critical thresholds can be breached."

"The reality is, failing to commit to internationally credible emissions reductions in Australia is putting the health of Australians at risk. Acting on climate change is a vital and urgent public health initiative. It is simple: failure to act is killing people. The more we delay, the more people will die, and die unnecessarily," Dr Hanna said.

Media contact: Fiona Armstrong convenor@caha.org.au or 0438 900 005 or Dr Liz Hanna, liz.hanna@anu.edu.au or 0418 995 504.

The Climate and Health Alliance is a national coalition of health organisations representing doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers, researchers, university departments of public health, health care service providers, rural and remote health professionals, and health consumers.

www.caha.org.au